

Chief Darryl Forté retires

Interim chief named, national search underway for new leader

Darryl Forté, the history-making Chief of Police of the Kansas City Missouri Police Department since October 2011, slipped quietly into retirement May 20.

The man who was KCPD's first African-American chief and guided the department and City through one of the most tumultuous times in police-community relations in America's history did not have so much as a sheet cake to mark his retirement.

He did send out one parting message to department members, however.

"It has been my honor to serve our community with you for the past 31-plus years," he wrote.

"I'm proud of this organization. We have high-caliber sworn members and professional non-sworn members. Because of this, I continue to expect great things of the Kansas City Missouri Police Department. We have great developing leaders at all levels, so the future looks bright."

He also asked members to look out for each other's well-being, which he said was very important to him during his tenure as chief.

"One request I would make of you is to continue to be mindful of your wellness and that of your coworkers," he wrote. "This includes not just physical health but also mental and emotional well-being. That is one thing we focused on as an organization during my time as chief. Please continue to look out for each other's welfare."

The focus on employees' overall wellness was one of many shifts Chief Forté brought to the organization, said Lisa Pelofsky, who was a member of the Board of Police Commissioners that selected him. She served on the Board from 2010 to 2014.

"Overall, there were so many changes he made around the culture that really needed to be made," Pelofsky said. "I think that was crucial at the time he came in."



Seven-year-old Laurami and 5-year-old Caleb Beaver met up with Chief Forté on May 15 to wish him well in retirement and give him drawings they made.

Another change was Forté's accessibility to all segments of the community, Pelofsky said. One woman who knows that well is Rosilyn Temple. After her son Antonio "Pee Wee" Thompson was murdered in 2011, Temple set out to meet with the police chief. She heard he was coming out to every homicide scene, and that intrigued her. She called his office daily and was assured she would get in to see Forté. She did. She told him she wanted to go to homicide scenes to support families of other victims and the police department and be a liaison between the two because she knew what victims' loved ones were going through.

"I said there was a gap in our community, and he said, 'I've been looking for someone like you.'"

Thus began the idea that would become the Kansas City Chapter of Mothers in Charge, an organization whose mission is to reduce violent crime through prevention, education

and intervention, and to guide and support the families of victims. A Mothers in Charge volunteer now responds with police to every homicide in Kansas City. These volunteers have lost their own children to violence.

"I lost a child, but the Chief gave me an opportunity, an opportunity to change my life forever," Temple said. "I would have died if he hadn't done that."

Temple titled her final blog on the Mothers in Charge web site, "Darryl Forté, the community's police chief." In a later interview, she described how she saw him driving by her house one Saturday morning. He honked and waved.

"It made me feel safe," she said. "He was out here in the community a lot. People don't realize how that makes a community feel."

Pelofsky said she thinks Forté's legacy will be modernizing the police department. She said

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he identified populations that needed to be represented on the department and sought to recruit and retain them. He spoke out against bullying and intimidation among the ranks. He targeted resources in crime hot spot areas. The focused-deterrence Kansas City No Violence Alliance launched with his support. Pelofsky said he oversaw trailblazing changes in how the department operates – from de-escalation training to instituting a liaison for the LGBTQ community – and held employees accountable.

“He felt it was important to provide all the training possible for people to do their best job,” Pelofsky said. “But if they weren’t prepared or weren’t the kinds of people who should be in those jobs, then he recognized they needed to be removed.”

This has been critical following the 2014 officer-involved shooting in Ferguson, Mo., that sparked a national backlash against police. While other cities rioted, Kansas City remained relatively calm.

“Part of his legacy is about fairness and tolerance: treating people with respect regardless of whether they’re a suspect or an employee or a commander or a non-sworn staff member,” Pelofsky said. “He facilitated those conversations.”

Forté advised the Board of Police Commissioners of his retirement about two months in advance. That information was soon picked up by the media, which is where Temple heard about it.

“I was hurt because he was from this community, he loves this community, he was a community chief,” she wrote on her blog. “But then I thought, he worked hard. He wants to be with his family. He deserves to live his life. So now what I say is: Well done, good and faithful servant, Chief Forté.”

David Zimmerman named interim chief

On May 12, the Board of Police Commissioners named Deputy Chief David Zimmerman to serve as interim chief of police. Zimmerman will serve as chief of police until the search process is concluded and the Board selects a permanent chief. With his family by his side, Zimmerman took the chief’s oath of office May 20.

Board President Leland Shurin said the Board wanted someone who was not in the running for the chief of police position to serve as interim. Although he had not yet been sworn in, Zimmerman served as acting chief for several weeks leading up to his being named interim. He served as master of ceremonies at the department’s annual Memorial Service on May 18.

Interim Chief Zimmerman joined the Kansas City Missouri Police Department in January 1983 as an entrant officer and has served in numerous roles throughout the department since. He has worked in patrol as both an officer and commander, as a detective in the Narcotics and Vice Division and Internal Affairs Unit, and he later oversaw the Budget Unit and Fiscal Division. His most recent assignment was as commander of the Patrol Bureau.

Chief Zimmerman is a graduate of Oak Park High School, and he has a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice administration and a master’s degree in public administration, both from Park University. He is a 2001 graduate of the FBI National Academy. He is married to retired KCPD Major Jan Zimmerman, who now serves as chief of police of the Raymore Police Department.

Chief Zimmerman is continuing with the rather recent tradition of posting on the KCPD Chief’s Blog, instituted by James Corwin in 2009. He posted about his first week on the job on May 26.

“As for the community we serve, the support I have received over the past week is humbling as individuals I don’t personally know approach me with words of congratulations, along with offers to help and kind words of reassurance,” he wrote.

Search for replacement underway

The Board of Police Commissioners announced the process for selecting a new chief at a May 1 press conference. The process began with three public forums May 8, 15 and 16 held in the north, south and Midtown areas of the City. Board members asked community members what qualities they thought would be important to seek in the next police chief. The common theme from those who spoke at the forums was a chief who was deeply involved with the community and championed community policing initiatives.



David Zimmerman was sworn in as Interim Chief on May 20.

The Board has retained the firm Ralph Andersen and Associates to assist in a national search for a new police chief. The firm is based in Rocklin, Calif. Several attendees at the public forums objected to looking outside of Kansas City for candidates, saying they preferred someone who already had a knowledge base of Kansas City.

“We want the best,” Mayor Sly James responded. “How will we know if we’ve got the best if we don’t see what’s out there?”

The Board did not use a search firm during their 2011 search. Pelofsky said they assumed the opening would attract a large pool of candidates. While she recalls

receiving about 40 applications for the spot, there were few qualified national applicants. She said she thinks that was partly because of the salary, which is low compared to that of other major city police chiefs.

“So we needed someone with a sense of public service that goes well beyond a financial incentive,” she said.

The deadline for applicants to apply for the chief of police position was May 31. Board President Shurin said the Board will spend the next several months reviewing the candidates to develop a group of finalists. The Board has not decided how many there will be. Five people were named finalists during the 2011 search process. Shurin said those finalists will then take questions from community members at another public meeting. The new chief should be named not long afterward, likely in late August or September. Shurin said he did not want to put a strict timeline on the process to ensure nothing is rushed and the department gets the best candidate possible.

But who actually will be doing the selection remains up in the air, somewhat. Three of the four Board of Police Commissioners members appointed by the Missouri governor have terms that have expired: Alvin Brooks, Michael Rader and Angela Wasson-Hunt. All were appointed by former Democratic Gov. Jay Nixon. Republican Gov. Eric Greitens was inaugurated in January. In the past, governors from a different political party than their predecessors have replaced termed-out BOPC members with their own selections. Alvin Brooks already resigned from the Police Board on May 24 after being elected to the Hickman Mills School Board. Board President Shurin and Mayor James could be the only current Board members to select Kansas City’s Chief of Police. Gov. Greitens’ office has not given any indication on when or if new Board members will be named.

Remembering Sergeant Leach



The Department's annual Memorial Service to honor the 119 KCPD officers who have died in the line of duty took place May 18. The sister of the late Sergeant James Leach, Patty Robinson, and his best friend and coworker, Retired Sergeant Randall Sims, spoke at the service about the night Sergeant Leach and another man, David Biggers, were intentionally killed by a driver in Westport on May 2, 1992. On the 25th anniversary of his death, May 2, 2017, Leach's former coworkers and friends gathered to hold a memorial event and fund-raiser at Kelly's Bar in Westport, not far from where he was killed. Funds raised went to Independence Police Officer Tom Wagstaff, who was critically injured in March when he was shot in the head while responding on a call for service.



Entrant Officer Class 159 Graduates

Entrant Officer Class 159 graduated May 18, with 10 officers being sworn into the Kansas City Missouri Police Department, and four sworn into outside agencies. The Richard Fletcher Director's Award went to KCPD Officer Parker Rauschelbach.



Upcoming Events

June 13
Board of Police
Commissioners Meeting

June 23
North Patrol Division
Ribbon Cutting

June 29
Award Ceremony

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Officially Speaking

Awards

Meritorious Service Award
Officer Nathan Magers

Certificate of Commendation
Sergeant Brian Karman
Sergeant Conrad Stumpenhous
Officer Charles Chambers
Officer Estevan DuQue
Officer Seth Pritchett
Communications Specialist Marsha Bradley

25-Year Rings

Computer Services Analyst Robert Barry
Detective Darrel Reach

Retirements

Chief of Police Darryl Forté
Major Melvin Harvey
Officer Scott Wells
Operations Analyst Richard Johnson

Obituaries

Retired Officer Richard R. Gardner
Retired Officer Jeffery Wishard
Retired Fleet Operations Tech. Richard E. Gardner

The mission of the
Kansas City Missouri
Police Department is to
protect and serve with
professionalism, honor
and integrity.